



CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE

IN FISCAL 2000, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) continued to provide Congress with high-quality research and analysis. At the same time, CRS prepared for the future by adapting to a changing congressional and information-technology environment.

The statutory mission of CRS, as established in the 1970 Legislative Reorganization Act, is to provide Congress with comprehensive and reliable research, information, and analysis that is timely, objective, nonpartisan, and confidential. Those values continue to guide every aspect of CRS work.

This fiscal year, CRS prepared for future challenges by making improvements in its client services. In an effort to enhance its tradition of being the resource that Congress turns to first, CRS continued implementing the organizational realignment that began in fiscal 1999. Intended to cluster coverage of public policy issues in a manner that best suits the legislative needs of Congress, this initiative was the first major restructuring of CRS since the 1970 Legislative Reorganization Act. The realignment is designed to improve CRS's ability to focus on the legislative deliberations of Congress by applying its multidisciplinary expertise to public policy issues when Congress needs assistance in user-friendly, accessible formats. During fiscal 2000, CRS responded to nearly 598,000 congressional requests.

On February 29 and March 1, 2000, CRS hosted a Bicentennial symposium

Former Representative David Skaggs, former Senator Nancy Kassebaum Baker, the Librarian of Congress, former Senator Dale Bumpers, and former Representative Mickey Edwards participate in a CRS-sponsored Bicentennial symposium titled “Informing Congress and the Nation.” (Photo by Yusef El-Amin)



titled “Informing the Congress and the Nation.” The symposium opened with a keynote address by historian Merrill Peterson, which was followed by sessions on the ways Congress informed itself in the nineteenth century, the evolution of the informing function in the contemporary Congress, and the relationship between the Library and the Congress.

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANCE

CRS provided written and electronic products; briefings and consultations; and other analytic, reference, and information services to assist Congress as it considered a host of domestic and international issues. The following examples of CRS legislative assistance during fiscal 2000 highlight the interdisciplinary nature of the support that CRS provides Congress.

Agriculture. Congressional interest in agriculture issues in the past year focused primarily on appropriating funds to support falling farm income for major commodity groups (wheat, rice, soybeans, cotton, feedgrains, dairy, and livestock). CRS analysts addressed the agriculture budget and appropriations; agricultural trade; federally supported commodity programs and fruit, vegetable, and livestock issues; crop insurance and risk management; biotech and other new technologies; land and water conservation legislation; and other issues.

Aviation Reform. Reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was passed and signed into law as the Wendell H. Ford Aviation Invest-

ment and Reform Act for the 21st Century. CRS analysts assisted members of Congress and congressional committees as they changed the budget treatment of the airport and airway trust fund and as they considered the Airport Improvement Program. CRS also prepared reports and memoranda and conducted briefings on issues related to FAA reauthorization.

Bankruptcy Reform. Senate consideration and passage of the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 2000 was a significant legislative event during fiscal 2000. CRS attorneys tracked and analyzed the many amendments to this legislation, which had previously passed the House. During the conference process, CRS responded to numerous inquiries on the legislation's content and status.

Budget Process. As federal budget issues continued to dominate the legislative agenda, CRS provided support for congressional consideration of the fiscal 2001 congressional budget resolution, annual appropriations bills, and revenue reconciliation legislation. Coverage also focused on congressional budget reform proposals, including the biennial budgeting, the proposals to reform the appropriations process, and the proportion of time that the House devotes to appropriations legislation. Other support activities included analysis of potential implications of a constitutional amendment to limit tax legislation and assessment of the Senate practice of introducing its own appropriations bills, rather than amending House measures. CRS focused on the congressional practice relating to parliamentary rules enforcing separation of authorization and appropriations measures and on other procedures relating to appropriations bills. The appropriations and budget section of the CRS Web site, which consistently received a heavy volume of visits, was enhanced and streamlined for ease of use.

Campaign Finance Reform. Congress sought to break the stalemate on campaign finance reform by enacting amendments to the Internal Revenue Code that required disclosure by political organizations that are tax exempt under section 527 and that are involved in election activity. Attorneys plus government and finance analysts formed an interdivisional team that assisted members of Congress and congressional committee staff members in evaluating the complexities of this issue, especially in clarifying various discrepancies between the nation's tax legislation and election laws.

China. CRS work on China increased as Congress considered legislation related to China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United States's granting to China permanent normal trade relations (PNTR). CRS staff members analyzed whether, in light of the United States's WTO obligations, legislation was needed to authorize the president to grant, unconditionally, PNTR to China. In addition, they considered whether the benefits of

China's WTO membership would redound to the benefit of the United States through the most-favored-nation clauses of our current bilateral commercial agreement with China. Their research examined how China's entry into the WTO might affect U.S. economic and security interests and how China's economic and social conditions, including religious persecution and labor conditions, might have a bearing on events. Chinese arms acquisitions and weapons proliferation, suspected acquisition of U.S. nuclear weapons data, and trade remedies were subjects of study as well.

Electric Utility Restructuring. CRS provided legislative support as Congress considered several proposals for restructuring electric utilities. This support included member briefings, committee staff briefings, hearing preparation materials, analytical memos, and CRS reports.

Elementary and Secondary Education. The second session of the 106th Congress continued debate on many aspects of the federal role in elementary and secondary education, including issues such as increasing the authority of states and local school districts over the use of federal funds; improving teacher quality and quantity; and improving the effectiveness of major programs of aid to at-risk students, such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was considered for reauthorization. CRS analysts assisted House and Senate committees as they marked up legislation on such matters and helped committees develop and analyze options. Those options included provisions on accountability plus changes in the formula under which funds are distributed to rural school districts. To analyze formula alternatives, CRS developed a database that allowed analysts to conduct analyses not available elsewhere. CRS findings were instrumental in the selection of the allocation formula as passed by the House.

Encryption Export Controls. CRS assisted Congress as it considered the Security and Freedom through Encryption Act of 1999, which relates to export controls over encryption. Among other measures, the bill as introduced would have granted to the secretary of commerce the sole authority over nonmilitary encryption and, generally, the liberalized controls over encryption exports. CRS informed the congressional debate on those issues by analyzing court decisions and administration action.

Financial Services Modernization. Economic analysts surveyed a wide variety of implementation issues following passage of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act early in fiscal 2000. Studies and reports addressed the size, scope, and accelerating trends of mergers and acquisitions among banks and other financial services institutions, as well as state regulation and organization of insurance firms. New sunshine provisions of the Community Reinvestment Act, plus sweep ac-



A Congressional Research Service analyst reviews public policy literature.
(Photo by Jerry David)

counts and payment of interest on business checking accounts, were also studied, as was merchant banking. The capital structure and mission overhaul of the Federal Home Loan Bank System was another topic for analysis.

Internet Technologies. Congress has a growing interest in Internet technologies, applications, policies, and the Internet industry. CRS provided support in the areas of electronic commerce; the deployment of broadband technologies and the federal role; federal research and development policies for next-generation Internet technologies; Internet security and privacy issues; the “digital divide” issue; and federal, state, and local telecommunications policies.

Kosovo and Southeastern Europe. The situation in Kosovo and Serbia in the aftermath of the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) air campaign continued to be of congressional interest. CRS provided support for the congressional hearings, the formulation and consideration of legislation, and congressional delegations to Southeastern Europe. CRS tracked developments in Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro; NATO military operations; U.S. reconstruction assistance; and issues about the United States and European countries sharing burdens. A team of specialists produced one of the earliest after-action analyses of NATO and U.S. combat air operations in Serbia and Kosovo. The report was widely used and hailed by legislators from the United States and allied nations.

Legislative Process. CRS analysts responded to continued congressional interest in the state of the legislative process with new studies on several of its salient

contemporary features. These analyses assessed issues such as the variety and use of expedited procedures for congressional disapprovals. Another such study examined the evolving Senate practice of “filling the amendment tree,” or offering amendments in a way that preempts any amendments by opponents. CRS also responded to high congressional interest in expedited procedures on regulatory review, in unfunded mandates, and in international trade. CRS analysts supported members’ interest in the increasing availability of procedures to enhance flexibility in resolving House-Senate conference committee differences, as well as interest in the implications of congressional report language for policy implementation by executive branch agencies.

Medicare and Managed Care Reform. Proposals to reform Medicare were high on the congressional agenda for much of the fiscal year. CRS specialists worked with congressional committees to explore reform options such as adding a prescription drug benefit under Medicare, moving toward a competitively negotiated managed care benefit, and changing the administrative structure of the program. CRS analysts wrote memoranda, briefed committee staff members on actuarial estimates of costs, and analyzed alternative proposals. They also appeared as expert witnesses before the Senate Finance Committee on Medicare reform issues. Issues related to patients’ rights under employer-provided health plans also received significant congressional attention during the year. CRS analysts and attorneys examined the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) and managed care reform. Areas of particular focus were the independent review of claim denials and the right to sue a health plan or insurer. Health care and legal analysts conducted a joint briefing for staff members from various congressional offices and committees.

Nuclear Waste Policy. With both the House and Senate taking action on nuclear waste legislation in 2000, CRS received numerous inquiries on the issue throughout the year. CRS analysts assisted Congress with questions about the transportation of nuclear waste to the proposed disposal site in Nevada, the possible alternatives for nuclear waste management, the costs for nuclear waste storage, the legal commitments by the Department of Energy, and a wide variety of related issues. At the start of the second session of the 106th Congress, CRS conducted a Public Policy Institute session on pending nuclear waste bills: H.R. 45, a comprehensive rewrite of the existing waste law, and S. 1287, which would have made relatively limited amendments to the existing law in this area.

Rising Fuel Prices. Heating oil and diesel fuel prices rose sharply during the winter of 1999. In the spring of 2000, gasoline prices rose rapidly, and there were significant regional disparities in prices. Such developments led to consid-

erable congressional interest in rising fuel prices, which generated a high volume of requests for memoranda, background information, telephone consultations, and personal briefings. A visiting scholar prepared a detailed report on the potential oil and gas supply to world markets from the Caspian Sea region.

Social Security, Pensions, and Disability. In repealing the Social Security Earnings Test for recipients above the full retirement age, Congress was supported by CRS analysts working with congressional committees to consider options and to refine legislative language. CRS researchers analyzed retirement-related legislation such as bills concerning arrangements for personal retirement savings and the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act. The Congressional Research Service worked closely with Congress on disability legislation, including the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, which makes changes to a number of cash, health, and social service programs affecting persons with disabilities. CRS analysts and attorneys brought a multidisciplinary approach to their assistance on this legislation. CRS also analyzed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, interpreted court cases dealing with the definition of disability, and assisted in preparing hearings that marked the tenth anniversary of the ADA.

Taxation. Economic analysts prepared assessments of a range of tax issues, including specific provisions included in President Clinton's fiscal 2001 budget and in Congress's continued consideration of the proposed Taxpayer Refund and Relief Act of 1999. Tax-issue support also included information, consultations, and analyses in areas such as the marriage tax penalty, the alternative minimum tax, the tax on capital gains, the tax treatment of savings, expiring tax provisions, the estate and gift taxation, the foreign tax credits, the excise taxes, and the tax preferences for health insurance. Additional assistance included analyzing proposals to restructure the Internal Revenue Service, comparing historical levels of the U.S. tax burden, evaluating various forecasts of publicly held debt levels, and continuing to review various flat-tax plans.

Trade. CRS supported congressional consideration of numerous bills and resolutions that received committee or floor action. Trade legislation for which CRS provided assistance included bills to reauthorize the Export Administration Act; to ease sanctions against Cuba, North Korea, Sudan, Libya, and Iran; to call on the United States to withdraw from the WTO; and to replace the foreign sales corporation tax with a system that would move the United States toward a more territorial system. Among other trade issues that analysts researched, CRS also provided continuous information, analysis, consultations, and other support for hearings on the Africa trade bill, which was enacted after a four-year effort by its supporters.

Veterans' Affairs. The 106th Congress continued to expand access to outpatient care and increased appropriations beyond projections to provide necessary resources as the Veterans Administration's (VA's) medical caseload doubled over five years. CRS worked with congressional committees to examine implications of opening enrollment in the VA's health plan to cover all veterans. CRS prepared memoranda and participated with committee staff members in discussions of alternatives. A CRS expert also briefed staff members who wished to address perceived disparities in resource allocations within the health care system and assisted committees and caucuses in developing alternative uses for redundant capacity in medical facilities.

CRS MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

In fiscal 2000, CRS management and staff members continued to implement the organizational realignment of the Congressional Research Service launched in fiscal 1999. This work has required, among other efforts, extensive relocation of staff members and the creation of more efficient workstations. The relocations are expected to be completed early in fiscal 2001. The realignment also promotes improved communications within CRS and enhanced interdisciplinary coordination, particularly on complex public policy issues that cut across research division boundaries.

To provide CRS research staff members with an integrated location for their research needs, management created two of three planned Information Resource Centers. One center supports research on defense, foreign affairs, trade, economics, and social policy, while the other contains collections supporting resources, science, and industry. The third center is scheduled to open during fiscal 2001 and will facilitate access to congressional documents.

CRS continued to face the prospect of extensive turnover of its research staff members because of retirements, and it pursued efforts to attract, train, and retain a talented and diverse workforce. To accomplish this goal, management implemented enhanced outreach programs to recruit new analysts and researchers and continued the succession planning initiative that was started in fiscal 1998. In addition to its CRS Graduate Recruit program, CRS also conducted Law Recruit programs aimed at attracting a diverse group of high-caliber attorneys. CRS also participates in the governmentwide Presidential Management Intern program. The succession initiative resulted in the hiring of new CRS analysts, attorneys, and librarians to fill the void created by staff members who have retired or plan to do so in the near future. In 1999, an Office of Workforce Development was created in CRS to coordinate management of this initiative, as well as other human resource issues within CRS.

In addition, CRS launched a future directions initiative that is intended to develop a five-year strategic plan. Extensive brainstorming sessions were held with staff members throughout CRS to solicit their input on how to define and address the future challenges that CRS faces. Those sessions resulted in numerous staff suggestions on changes both in how CRS does its work and in how it provides its assistance to Congress.

Throughout the year, a key challenge for CRS was to facilitate effective congressional use of CRS as a shared staff and as an extension of Congress's own staff. CRS thus focused on improving client services and aligning its work to best meet congressional needs. Improving the quality of client services involved communicating effectively with congressional clients, improving products and services, and offering the highest level of public policy analysis. Improving services and aligning the CRS workload with that of Congress included holding managers accountable for performance results, encouraging effective vertical and horizontal communication within CRS, sustaining the CRS product infrastructure, integrating new technology into the CRS culture, replacing retiring analytical and research staff members, and adapting the institution to both anticipated and unanticipated challenges.

A CRS team began legislative planning early for the 107th Congress. This planning includes providing briefings for new member offices, developing strategies for informing Congress about enhancements to the CRS Web site and about CRS services generally, and planning and conducting policy and procedure orientations for new members.

TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES

The Congressional Research Service sought to harness developments in the field of information technology so staff members could meet the congressional demand for rapid, reliable, and nonpartisan public policy information. The systems at CRS were upgraded as required, and it worked with the Library of Congress to move to an Ethernet network to improve speed, efficiency, and collaborative research capability. Full conversion to Ethernet throughout CRS is anticipated in the coming fiscal year.

The CRS Web site is an increasingly popular resource for members of Congress and their staff members. A new feature of the CRS Web site is an interactive site devoted to analyzing and interpreting the U.S. Constitution. In addition, Web pages were developed on grants information and on ways of tracking the distribution of federal funds.

A team was assembled to study the best way to redesign the Web site to optimize it for client service, to fully support the current range of CRS products

and services, to facilitate interaction between CRS staff members and Congress, and to provide new types of products and services that respond to changing congressional analysis and information needs. This team prepared a detailed strategic plan, which included congressional client interviews and factor analysis. The initial redesign was completed, and toward the end of the fiscal year, the focus moved to implementation of the new Web site. The redesigned site will offer several enhancements and features such as improved navigation, new headers and logos, and topical access to key CRS products from the home page. It also will meet level-A accessibility standards for people with disabilities.

In response to congressional interest in being able to submit requests electronically, CRS developed a pilot test to enable congressional offices to place secure research requests through the CRS Web site. Implementation of this service and the launch of the new site are anticipated for early fiscal 2001, when the 107th Congress convenes.

The *Legislative Alert*, a weekly listing of CRS products related to legislation scheduled for House and Senate floor action, was delivered by e-mail to congressional offices. This listing, along with the Legislative Information System Web site, continued to offer Congress resources specifically focused on its immediate legislative needs.

Electronic briefing books—comprehensive, Web-based briefings on topics of continuing congressional interest—have been issued since fiscal 1998 and are posted and updated on the CRS Web site. During the year, new electronic briefing books were prepared on issues related to trade and K–12 education.

A development team assessed systems that could support archiving and could display congressional information on demand, such as hearings in video format. Toward the end of fiscal 2000, CRS began evaluation of real-time Web casts of CRS public policy seminars on the CRS Web site.

To better enable CRS to determine how and when Congress uses its reports, CRS staff members developed a system that provides managers and analysts access to real-time data on distribution of CRS written products.

Information security continued to be a major focus of CRS's technological support. Efforts in this area included acquisition of additional backup servers, system monitoring software, improvements in firewall protection, regular internal and external testing of the integrity of data, and final work on security guidelines for all CRS staff members.

The year 2000 transition in information systems was achieved successfully. All systems and programs were tested, certified as Y2K compliant, or replaced and upgraded as required. This change was accomplished with no disruption in service to Congress and without compromise to any CRS support system.